

CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS LETTER

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SPECIAL NUMBER — FOREFATHERS' DAY

Sunday, November 18, 1956

The Forefathers were pioneers not only in building new homes in the American wilderness but in developing a new way of life both in church and state that has come to be called Americanism. These New England pioneers were venturing not only into a new country but into a new area of thought and action. They had not come to America with the purpose of transplanting to these shores a European culture. They sought a new way of life, a life of freedom and security. Their former religious, political and social life became so changed that both in America and England the "New England Way" was early labeled "an American invention."

Other groups coming to America usually sought to set up their church and civil agencies after a European pattern, but as the years went on these new groups, confronting pioneer conditions and being at such a distance from European centers, gradually developed independent forms and ideals somewhat similar to those of New England. In time the essentials of the "New England Way" became consciously, or unconsciously, incorporated in our national life and are clearly evident today.

The Manchester (England) *Guardian*, a great world paper, in its issue of August 9, 1956, commenting on Americans, said:

"One of the outstanding characteristics of Americans is their willingness to experiment with new ideas and new discoveries and their eagerness to see if they work and what results they produce. They are prepared to take any scientific discovery from the laboratory and translate it into the terms of the engineering shop or the factory. In the religious field one of the principal differences between the Churches in America and those in Europe is that while we have been discussing at ever greater length and with ever increasing subtlety whether the affirmations of the Christian Gospel are a set of "meaningless noises," they give their time and energy to finding out what happens if we take these affirmations — or some rival set — at their face value as a way of life. It is refreshing and cheering that when we have propounded our theorems and solemnly pronounced the Q.E.D. there should be the voice that says, 'So what?' and 'Where do we go from here?' and will not say 'Nothing' and 'Nowhere' for answers."

The ideals of the Fathers concerning freedom of thought, self-discipline, community responsibility and their acceptance of the principle that "private interests must not be put in opposition to the public good" and their "great ideals and noble visions," are a heritage which the pioneers, with all their shortcomings and experimental failures, have left us as a Way of Life highly worthy of being held in respect and reverent memory.

The memories and meanings of the great days celebrated in this season should deepen our understanding of our many-sided heritage. Let us not assume an attitude of complacency but rather of rededication to the ideals that gave to the lives and labor of the Fathers everlasting values.

F. L. F.

FACTS ABOUT THANKSGIVING Colonial Thanksgiving Days

Governor William Bradford of the Massachusetts Colony was the founder of the Thanksgiving festival. As early as 1621 he called together the early settlers at Plymouth for the purpose of offering thanks to God for the preservation of their lives, food to sustain them, and clothing for their bodies. A man of strong religious convictions, Governor Bradford continued to call, periodically, seasons of thanksgiving. One of his earliest written manuscripts was entitled, "God's Merciful Dealings with us in the Wilderness."

The Original Record of The First Thanksgiving Day

The gathering of the first harvest at Plymouth in 1621 was celebrated by a week of joyous festivity. "Our harvest being gotten in, our Governor sent four men on fowling . . . they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the Company almost a week, at which time against other Recreations, we exercised our Arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five Deer, which they brought to the Plantation, and bestowed on our Governor, and upon the Captain, and others. And although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."

Mourts Relation

Following the early Plymouth celebrations there were occasional revivals but no wide celebration until after the close of the Revolution when President Washington issued a proclamation "setting aside November 26 for the citizens of the New Nation to thank God for a constitutional form of government with its manifold blessings."

In 1815 President Madison revived the custom, but for nearly half a century thereafter there were no national proclamations until the proclamation of 1863 by President Lincoln.

Harper's Weekly of 1863, commenting on Lincoln's proclamation, said: "It is a fortunate circumstance that our annual thank-offering festival has become a national affair in which the whole people participate upon a common day. . . . We forget that we are states and come to offer tribute to God in our capacity as a nation. The festival thus becomes more significant, not only in its altered character but in its larger suggestions and motives."

The Presidents since Lincoln have followed his lead in issuing annual proclamations, and the outstanding characteristic of the Thanks-

giving celebration was well expressed by President Lincoln in these ever-living words: "It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truths announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord."

THE MAYFLOWER COMPACT

The Compact

In The Name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith, etc.

Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.

Signed,
Cape Cod, November 11, 1620, Old Style
(November 21, New Style)

The Mayflower Pilgrims

"The Compact is one of the most important acts known to history. Here was the germ root of our great Republic; the first charter of a government for the people and by the people known to history. This historic occurrence is the subject of one of the great paintings in the Rotunda of the Capitol at Washington. It is also commemorated, as a notable occurrence in English History, in a splendid mural painting in the Houses of Parliament in London."

EDMUND J. CARPENTER

The American Cornerstone

"The Mayflower Compact was a simple extension of a Church covenant . . . by men who realized that they were soon to be left alone to found a settlement in an ungoverned waste. . . . It became the cornerstone of American democratic theory, even if it was not widely quoted until the need of rationalizing our political ideas made itself felt in the years preceding the Revolution. . . . Alone in the American wilderness they formed the first free state in the New World. . . ." CHARLES W. ELIOT

"The Compact is perhaps the only instance in human history of that positive, original social compact, which speculative philosophers have imagined as the only legitimate source of government." JOHN Q. ADAMS

A WEEK OF REMEMBRANCE

Sunday — November 18 — Forefathers' Day, so designated by vote of the General Council, New Haven, Conn., June 30, 1954. A revival of a celebration observed for years by the Congregational churches.

Wednesday — November 21 — Compact Day, so designated by the General Society of Mayflower Descendants. Abundant material for schools and churches: Box 936, Providence 1, R. I.

Thursday — November 22 — National Thanksgiving Day, so designated by the President of the United States in accordance with national custom.

A FATHER HONORED

The Windsor Avenue Church and the Fourth Avenue Church of Hartford, Conn., have united under the name of The Horace Bushnell Church, thus honoring one of America's most distinguished clergymen and for many years pastor in Hartford and writer of outstanding religious books, among which is *Christian Nurture*.

laying a Good Historical Foundation

History to have value must be founded on acts. Our office recently received the copy of the proceedings of the Santa Clara Association of California meeting at Redwood City as a council to consider application for admission of the Ladera Congregational Church. The records of the council include a statement concerning the new church — how, when and by whom organized, with factual data of fine historical value, not only for the present but for the long years ahead. This paper carefully preserved will be of great help when this church approaches its centennial. What a fine preparation for the future it would be if every new church could add a similar document to our growing archives! Will State Superintendents and Association clerks kindly take note!!

The Society's New Treasurer

Dr. James H. Lightbourne, Superintendent of the Rhode Island Conference, has been appointed by the President of the Society as interim treasurer since Rev. John A. Harrer resigned. Mr. Harrer, who has been our most helpful treasurer from the organization of the Society, found his work increasing to the point where he decided he should seek some relief. He will continue an officer of the Society assisting in reference work and as librarian.

Dr. Lightbourne has been one of the most faithful workers for the Society from the beginning and will provide us with good service in his important office.

THREE FRIENDS OF THE SOCIETY

The Society recently has lost three good friends:

Thomas Todd, Boston, Mass., July 18. Mr. Todd was a Vice-President of our Society and to it he gave wholehearted support. To him belonged the credit for making our *News Letter* possible. He was well known in business and church affairs. His firm, founded in 1864 by his grandfather, has been closely related to the work of our churches.

Robert G. Armstrong, Hartford, Conn., July 25; State Historian and Editor of the State paper; former Superintendent of the New Hampshire Conference; pastor emeritus of the historic old church at Lebanon, Conn. He was a valiant worker in behalf of our Society.

Warren H. Denison, Grinnell, Iowa, August 27. He was chairman of the Society's Committee on Christian Church History and deeply interested in the Society and its future. Dr. Denison was Secretary of the General Convention of the Christian Church and former Assistant Secretary of the General Council. He had a nation-wide reputation as a church leader, especially for his work in Stewardship.

Putting Our House in Order and So Keeping It

As we look forward to the future and plan for our work with the Evangelical and Reformed Church, our churches should put their records in permanent form. Every church has its own history and into the record has gone the thought, the prayers, and the work perhaps of generations. It has taken sacrifice and service to build a church and to establish a working congregation. Whether the years have been few or many, the story of the development of a church has permanent value. A record of the services of the men and women whose lives have been knit into the fabric of the church's spiritual and material structure deserves being held in memory. Each church has its heritage and so has our fellowship. Our Evangelical and Reformed friends do not expect us to enter into the Union with empty hands but to bring our records and our spiritual treasures. These friends look to us to make the United Church richer by our contributions. Let us put our houses, both material and spiritual, in good order for their enrichment and for our own sense of good work well done and worthy.

A LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

Minister: Our Forefathers trusted in thee; they trusted and thou didst deliver them.

Congregation: They cried unto thee and were delivered; they trusted in thee and were not confounded.

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel.

Which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known unto their children.

That the generation to come might know them,
even the children that should be born.

That they might set their hope in God,
and not forget to keep his command-
ments.

Thou didst guide our fathers in their pilgrimage.

Thou madest a way through deep waters
and didst set their feet in a large place.

The winds heard thy voice and the waves bore
them to a secure haven.

These were noble men and women whose courage and righteousness hath not been forgotten and whose names shall be kept in remembrance.

Their deeds live forevermore.

The people will tell of their wisdom,
and will show forth their praise.

Grant, O Lord, that the heirs of their liberty
may possess their courage, patience and fidelity.

Unison: May this people never forget the rock from which this nation was hewn, but forever adore thee for thy mercy and loving kindness, for thou art our God forever and ever. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

A MEDITATION
FOR FOREFATHERS' DAY
Forward with Them

And they were on the road . . . and Jesus was walking ahead of them. Mark 10: 36

Read verses 32-33

Forefathers' Day is the Lord's Day. Let our first thought be of him.

When the disciples remembered how Jesus walked "ahead of them," they would see him on the road to the future, leading still.

We believe this because it is our own experience. Those whom we have loved come to us from the heart of memory. Straightway we see them, on ahead. Their memory is fair and bright when we follow where they lead. That happens at the Communion Table. In going back to Christ, remembering him, we rise to go forward with Christ, our strength renewed.

On Forefathers' Day we look to the future. There we see them, with their answerable courage, bidding us to attempt as great things for God in our time as they accomplished for him in their time. Let us rejoice that they and we belong to an innumerable company of men and women, venturing into the unknown with the Lord Christ "walking ahead." He will always be there, in the day and in the night, the same yesterday, today and forever. This is the heart of our Pilgrim faith.

Let Us Pray: O God in whom our fathers trusted, let thy good spirit lead us in the Way of Life and Love Triumphant, serving thee with gladness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ARTHUR H. BRADFORD
(From Daily Devotions)

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